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Matthew Smalarz

La Salle University

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Hong Xiuquan and the Subversion of Christianity

Matthew Smalarz

Hong Xiuquan may well be one of the bloodiest political and religious figures in human history. Many in the West are unaware of this man who was responsible for orchestrating a rebellion that led 20 million innocent men and women to their deaths. Yet even fewer understand the circumstances in which these 20 million died. (1) As China was recovering from the Opium War of the early 1840s, Hong, a disillusioned Confucian student, found solace in the Christian teachings of the West. But while finding peace in the teachings of Jesus, he also found a way to corrupt Christianity. Gradually, he came not to see himself as a disciple of Jesus, but his own brother incarnate. His display of megalomaniac tendencies knew no limits. Hong, having never received a formal Christian education, destroyed the purity of Jesus's teachings. He manipulated Christianity to the extent that he began to rewrite the Bible so that it would meet his personal inclinations. He was such a detestable character that he even offended Western Christian missionaries. In the end, he viewed his movement as the rightful kingdom of China as well as God's Heavenly Kingdom on earth. He failed to realize that his Heavenly Kingdom was a mere illusion. The objective of this paper is to spell out each of these preceding items in greater detail; by doing so, we will come to learn how one man and his movement subverted a faith for their own ideological purposes.

In the 1840s, China was an empire under attack. Reeling from the recent loss of the Opium War, China was an empire that lacked a strong centralized government to cope with the incoming European imperialist influence. The Qing Dynasty, which had been in power since 1644, continually had to contend with rebellions in Yunnan, Hunan, and Guangxi provinces. (2) In this hotbed of rebellion, Christianity became a spark of hope for the disillusioned. Protestant and Catholic missionaries were only allowed to preach in the Treaty ports after 1842. This, however, did not prevent the teachings of Jesus from seeping into China's interior. Organizations such as the American Seaman's Friend Society and the London Missionary Society maneuvered into China's treaty ports. The dissemination of Bibles had proliferated throughout Southern China's interior. Missionary preachers, such as Reverends Issachar Roberts, Karl Gutzlaff, William Milne, and Edwin Stevens, were popular Protestant missionaries who spread the word of God in China's treaty ports. Liang A-fa, the man whose writings influenced Hong, was distributing Bibles and tracts at Confucian examination halls in Canton during the 1830s. (3) Chinese Christian colporteurs, converts to Christianity, also carried Bibles into the interior of China.

Hong Xiuquan was just like any other young man, at that time, in China. His one hope was to pass the Confucian examinations. Each time he took the exams, however, he failed to pass. Upon his third failed attempt to pass the exams, he first became exposed to Christianity. While taking the exams in 1833 at Canton, he first encountered Liang A-fa's *Good Words To Admonish the Age*. Influenced by Christian missionaries, Liang's book, which had just been published, comprised large portions of Christian doctrine and Biblical references. (4) It is known that Hong did not really take these writings into consideration at first. Yet soon after he failed his third Confucian exam, in 1837, he experienced a dream that would have enormous repercussions. This dream was the first of many that would transform his personality forever. In this dream, a middle-aged man assisted Hong in slaying various beasts and demons that were attacking heaven. Hong successfully repressed

these demons and came to rest in his temporary heavenly abode. At times, he even identified his own family members as demons. (5) Yet his middle-aged assistant is of particular interest in this dream. He identified this individual as the Elder Brother or Jesus Christ. (6) After he re-entered the world of reality, he became an entirely different person. His personality apparently became more morally righteous as compared to the old Hong's witty, straightforward self. P. M. Yap indicates that Hong believed he was the recipient of a divine revelation. (7) His vision also brought with it a change in his name. He no longer referred to himself by his old name, Huoxiu, but, rather, as Xiuquan, or the Accomplished and Perfect one. (8)

Remarkably, Hong remained as a teacher in his local village until 1843. After he failed to pass the exams in 1843, he began to take greater interest in Liang's *Good Works*. It is apparent that Hong, for the first time, studied the Christian religion with intensity. From these texts, he began to interpret the dreams he had experienced some six years before. After reading these books, he became convinced that God the Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ were the two figures that had appeared in his dreams. Hong, for some strange reason, took himself to be the brother of Jesus; he also believed he was responsible for destroying all demons in the world. Hong began to preach to his family and friends about the virtues of his newly found religion. His enthusiasm for Christian doctrine, however, brought with it the destruction of his old faith. The strict iconoclastic beliefs of his Christian "interpretation" repudiated all forms of Confucian symbolism and Buddhist funerary rites. Because of his abnormal behavior, the village dismissed him from his post as a teacher in the local school. (9) Hong realized he could no longer stay in his village and thus began his spiritual movement. P.M. Yap suggests that he desired not only to convert China to his brand of Christian doctrine, but also destroy the oppressive Manchu Government in the North. (10) In my view, it is obvious that he already had the preconceived notion that he was in fact the savior of China, both morally and politically. For the next three years of his life, he traversed Guangxi province preaching his so called heavenly message. (11)

Hong's first experience with a Western missionary did not come until 1847. Issachar Jacob Roberts, a Protestant missionary, first encountered Hong in Canton. As mentioned before, most Christian teachings were taught primarily through Christian tracts, not missionaries. He was extremely enthusiastic about meeting his Christian counterpart. His enthusiasm was strengthened even more after Roberts decided he would instruct him on the fine points of Christian doctrine. Yet this relationship was brought to an unfortunate and mysterious end. Apparently, Roberts had come to the conclusion that his student should be baptized in the Christian faith. However, the committee responsible for conferring the baptismal rites on Hong remarked that he could not receive any form of employment from the church. Being a poor preacher of simple means, Hong was convinced his very survival would depend on the generosity of his mentor. Based on the evidence, Roberts was extremely dismayed that his student sought financial assurances regarding his future. It has been argued that because of this disconnect between the two men, Hong lost out on a great opportunity for further instruction in Christian doctrine. (12) In fact, I believe that Hong's failure to abandon financial security in return for a Christian education may have affected his later interpretation of Christian doctrine. I am also convinced Hong's objective was to manipulate the religion he had grown to appreciate in order to secure his own personal well-being. Even at these early stages, Hong's intentions were not holy, for if they were, he would have abandoned his desire for financial reward. However, it seems quite clear that Hong cared not for the sanctity of the word of God, but the word of Hong

Xiuquan.

Hong now returned to Guangxi in June 1847. At this time, he had successfully converted many to his movement, which he now identified as the God-Worshippers. He continued his missionary movement and built a strong coalition of worshippers and supporters. Yet in the bandit ridden rural areas, the God Worshippers soon realized they needed to defend themselves from being attacked from other bandit groups. However, it must be pointed out that the God-Worshippers were, to a large extent, bandits themselves. Beyond the element of protecting themselves, he also made it clear he was no friend of the state. While Hong was strongly convinced of his moral correctness in his iconoclastic policy, he also fervently believed the Qing dynasty should be destroyed. Instead, he proceeded to build his own Heavenly kingdom. This kingdom was based on a strict moral code that emphasized the community over the individual. All personal possessions, including money and gold, were utilized to build the army. Most importantly, he informed his followers that by dying in battle, they would achieve the ultimate goal: heaven. Word began to spread about what benefits this religion conferred upon its followers. By summer 1850, the God-Worshippers were prepared to take on the Qing dynasty for control of the Chinese state. (13) Throughout the next three years, the Taipings encountered success and defeat at the hands of their enemies. But the greatest victory came in March 1853. The conquest of Nanking marked the true beginning of Hong's vision of the Heavenly Kingdom on Earth. (14)

While the Taipings continued to battle the Qing for total control of China, Hong began writing "Taiping" Christian doctrine. In many ways, he withdrew from everyday life to implement the form of Taiping Christianity he felt suited his followers. But before we approach this topic, we must give some further background as to how he came into contact with the Christian Bible. Karl Gutzlaff, another prominent Protestant missionary in China, was responsible for the distribution of the Old and New Testament in China in the 1840s. (15) Gutzlaff's Chinese Union, a Chinese evangelization movement started in the 1840s, had been largely successful in the dissemination of bibles throughout China. It is highly probable that some converts to the Gutzlaff may have previously taught Taipings; there is no evidence that actually links Hong to Gutzlaff up to this point. Boardman points out that the Taipings first printed their own version of the Bible sometime in 1853. Yet we must not forget Hong's own encounter with the preacher Issachar Roberts in 1847. It has been previously established that he had taken up doctrinal studies with Roberts for two months in 1847. It is important to note, however, that Roberts largely received his translation of the Bible from Gutzlaff. (16) If this is the case, the Bible published in Nanking in 1853 was the one Hong had first seen back in 1847. From this, it is quite fascinating to see how he constructed his version of the Holy Bible.

First, the Taiping Biblical version of the Book of Genesis was not as true to the Gutzlaff version. For the first time, we see Hong take a degree of personal license with the way the Book of Genesis had been phrased. For example, in Genesis 19, Lot quickly escaped the soon to be doomed cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Upon the death of his wife, Lot was left with his two daughters. Realizing their father was the last man known to them, the two girls took it upon themselves to have sexual relations with him. The following passage is what greatly disturbed Hong's personal tastes: "And the first-born said unto the younger, Our father is old, and there is not a man in the earth to come in unto us after the manner of all the earth. Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father." (17) The very notion of incest in the Bible must have truly upset Hong. One might even say Protestant Christians would have also deemed this to be a licentious episode in

the Bible. Yet, without hesitation, it was ordered that this passage be struck from the Taiping Bible.

Hong's ability to manipulate the wording of the Bible to suit his needs was one of the most unnerving aspects of the Taiping faith. It is obvious that we are beginning to see the first signs of his megalomaniac tendencies. As Jesus Christ's "Younger Brother", he constantly felt obligated to rectify Biblical passages that did not fit his stream of thought. The purity of the Taiping Bible became extremely important to Hong and his Taiping state. There are many examples of Hong's reinterpretations of certain Old and New Testament Biblical stories. For instance, the story of a drunken, naked Noah found by his sons. He decided to take it upon himself to reword certain areas of this particular Biblical story. Hong rewrote this passage to state, "Noah while in a deep sleep tumbled from his bed onto the ground." (18) The attempt to conceal immoral behavior from his followers was priority number one to Hong. Also, Hong kept in mind the fact that he had to keep in check the good repute of his biblical ancestors. One story that truly disgusted him was the licentious tale of Tamar and Judah. Tamar had been married to Judah's three sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah. All three sons apparently disobeyed God's command and God subsequently killed each of them. The father, Judah, left Tamar behind to fend for herself. Yet Tamar had secretly planned to have sexual relations with her father-in-law. One day, Judah came across a prostitute and had sexual relations with her. Eventually Judah was informed by Tamar that she was with child and that the child was in fact Judah's. Hong could not tolerate this raunchy behavior. Therefore, he struck the entire passage from his version of the Bible. (19) Hong's revisions were not done, however. He believed God gave Moses too broad an interpretation on how sexual relations should be conducted. The following passage from Exodus 22: 16-17 will illustrate this point. The original verse stated, "And if a man entice a maid that is not betrothed, and lie with her, he shall surely endow her to be his wife. However, in Hong's version it stated, "And if a man entice a maid that is not betrothed, and lie with her, he is breaking the seventh commandment." (20)

Hong, although agreeing with most of what the Gospel writers had written, took it upon himself to make "editorial changes" in certain spots. For instance, most of his comments in the New Testament referred to matters involving God the Father and Jesus. Hong criticized the text for its purporting to believe that Christ alone was performing miracles. Simply put, he believed Jesus was not divine like God. This Arian belief system can be found in the Taiping Gospels. He was convinced God was working through Jesus to create these miracles. Therefore, Jesus was a man who was used as God's intermediary on Earth. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus healed the mother of Peter's wife, but only through "God's" direct assistance. (21) Another instance involved Jesus's healing of two blind men. Hong stated that, "God descended upon the Great Elder Brother. Thus a touch of the eyes restored the blind man to sight, and the dumb man was able to speak immediately." (22) It had now become Hong's mission to reedit the Bible to suit his religious belief system. Hong disliked the notion of disagreement between his own professed beliefs and the text he based his faith on. Without reconstructing the Bible, he would have not only done a great disservice to himself, but to future generations of Taiping followers. He also made it apparent that he wanted to maintain the spiritual character of the Bible. And finally, Hong realized Taiping Christianity had to follow in the footsteps of its ancestors. Johnathan Spence puts it best when he says that Hong, "made clear for all to see that Moses, God, and Hong Xiuquan think fruitfully as one." (23)

Hong's preoccupation with the development of the Taiping Bible was only one particular facet of Hong's total control over what was said and done in the Heavenly Kingdom. For example, he made it explicitly clear that Confucian texts were banned from his court. He deemed such texts as being demonic in nature. He explicitly stated that only the Bible and his own poetic compositions could be read aloud. Hong even went so far as to make sure that all names and geographic locations in the Bible were pronounced correctly. He also held an extreme reverence for the Ten Commandments. Hong made it court policy to preach the Ten Commandments every Sabbath. If those in his court failed to do so, they suffered severe punishment. (24) Hong, as much as he revered the Ten Commandments, still took the liberty to supplement his own commentaries for the Biblical version of the Commandments. He provided his own commentary alongside the Ten Commandments in order to inflate the seriousness of these commands. If his followers killed, stole, or committed adultery, the consequences may have involved public beatings or other harsh torture tactics. (25) Some of the Commandments were altered to either suit the Taiping community or Hong's own divine needs. For example, the sixth commandment, which states, "Thou shalt not kill", meant not only murder, but harming people as well. Likewise, the seventh commandment, which states, "Thou shalt not commit adultery", not only meant illicit sexual acts, but any covetous glance, thought, artistic idea, or even smoking opium. (26) In essence, Hong's intentions were quite clear. While he revered God, he had made himself into the image of a God. While one might say Hong resembled an Alexander the Great or Napoleon, I don't believe this is necessarily so. For example, it seems obvious that as much as Hong enjoyed the military successes that he encountered, his true passion lied in religious matters. Although Alexander and Napoleon both thought of themselves, at some point, as "demi-gods," Hong took his view of "God" to another extreme.

I think it is important to briefly divert from the theological discussion to understand the megalomaniac that lived within Hong's person. I believe it can be argued that Hong's mental illness took on a more pronounced form during his reign as the Heavenly King. It can be established that Hong's first true encounter with the Christian tracts of Liang, after his vision, may have caused him to believe he had experienced a divine revelation. While I argue Hong was a "Christian" in name, he was not in the doctrinal sense. Since he never received a formal education in Christian principles (besides the Roberts' visit), Hong believed he had discovered secret religious meanings only revealed to him. It is possible, as Y.M. Yap puts it, that Hong, when reading the biblical pronouns of "you" or "he", believed they referred directly to him. One must remember that Hong continually believed himself to be the Younger Brother of Jesus Christ. Also, Hong presumed his movement was destined to rid China of its Manchu conquerors from the North. Yet even though Hong led his Taiping army into battle, he would often withdraw into the confines of his mind. During the siege of Nanking, for example, Hong proclaimed men were useless and that God in heaven could only decide the final outcome of the conflict. Throughout his time in Nanking, Hong constantly abandoned earthly matters to his generals. (27) It is obvious, at least to myself, that he displayed a tendency toward delirium. Hong's attempt to implement his fantasy world in the real world was constant. In all probability, he may have not been able to tell the two apart. (28) He displayed a certain rigidity of the mind and an extremely suspicious mindset as he got older as well. These traits, as P. M. Yap argues, could be identified as schizophrenic-paranoid behavior. The only problem with such an argument is that no data can be provided to substantiate this point. Yet psychological studies have shown that

paranoia-like behavior can occur following religious encounters. (29) In my opinion, Hong did develop a behavioral disorder that inhibited his ability to make reasonable decisions. This disorder was responsible for destroying the purity of Protestant Christian doctrine.

Hong's ability to lead a constructive Christian movement was impeded by his dictatorial reach and his mental instability. And if this was the case, to what extent did he alter other basic New Testament doctrines? Taiping Christianity was, in fact, a combination of the orthodox, heterodox, and Chinese indigenous influences. While worshipping God, proclaiming Christ the savior, adhering to the Ten Commandments, and practicing the sacrament of baptism, they also began to incorporate a number of their own traditions. Hong was largely to blame for the implementation of these new practices. The first example that is important to point out was how the Taipings worshipped God. (30)

The worshipping of God was a central tenet in the Taiping faith. Hong is known to have borrowed and added to the Hebrew Bible with respect to understanding God. First, Hong believed that God was like a father to his people. (31) By using the notion of fatherhood, Hong was also trying to make an association with ancient Chinese Confucianism. The idea of filial piety toward parental figures and figures of authority (especially toward Hong) made the connection between God the Father and his Taiping children on Earth seem more realistic. (32) An excellent example of Hong's manipulation of God the Father took place on January 29, 1851. Hong informed his army officers that the titles Supreme (shang), Lord, (ti), and Father (yeh) were to be strictly used for praising God. Apparently, royal ministers, up to this point, had been called "royal fathers". Hong even acknowledged that he and his ministers had abused the word for their own worldly purposes. (33) Boardman points out that Hong's use of the Gutzlaff Bible led to a proliferation of similar Biblical terms by the Taipings. For example, Jesus was known as *Jiu Shizhu Tian-xiung yesu* or Jesus the Heavenly Brother and Lord who saves the Earth. (34)

The notion of the Fatherhood of God was taken to another level when Hong interpreted God's purpose to be a "productive" heavenly figure. In this sense, I believe Hong assumed God was responsible for the Taipings' military successes and the establishment of the Heavenly Kingdom. So while God was portrayed as being peaceful, he also was recognized for his ability to craft successful military sieges against the sinful Qing. Likewise, while Hong took bits and pieces of core Protestant Christian principles to fit his needs, he also developed a new family system out of line with Protestant doctrine. In this family system, he inserted a "Heavenly Mother" (possibly Mary) in order to round out the Heavenly Father and Son. Remarkably, Hong gave Jesus a wife, but no son. Instead, he made his own son the adopted heir to his Heavenly Big Brother's kingdom. (35) I argue that Hong's reconstruction of the family of God and God as Heavenly defender were due for three reasons. His mental condition, his firm belief in the notion of filial piety in the Chinese Confucian tradition, and his lack of comprehending Protestant Christian concepts all contributed to these two preceding Taiping doctrines.

Yet we must understand that Hong still maintained a monotheistic outlook. While he honored God's image as the Father of mankind, the notion of personal reverence to God never wavered. He continually argued that God was a personal deity. In essence, he argued that God was not subject to earthly princes alone. All people of God could invoke God's name for their own needs. By building on the God to man idea, he was actually mirroring the Hebrew Bible and the Gospels' interpretation of God's relationship to man. (36)

The issue of the Holy Spirit did not figure as prominently in Taiping doctrine as

compared to Protestant doctrine. The Holy Spirit, which came down from heaven after Jesus's ascension from heaven, had filled the Apostles with God's transcendent power. (37) The Holy Spirit only occasionally appears in Taiping religious documents. Boardman argues that the Taipings may have failed to understand the significance of the Holy Spirit in Christian doctrine. For example, in 1860, Hong stated in a religious document that the Eastern King, Yang Xiuqing, was in fact the Holy Spirit. (38) This egregious alteration made by him may have been largely due to his own failure to rationalize the meaning of the Trinity in Protestant Christian doctrine.

How did Hong interpret Christ's life? There are many similarities borne out between the Taiping and Protestant Bible with respect to Christ's life. First, Jesus was recognized as God's son sent down to rid the world of sin. Basic stories of Jesus's crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension are also mentioned in Taiping texts in order to stress God's salvation. However, it must be recognized that he no longer considered Jesus to be God's only son. Remember, he viewed himself as the Younger Brother of Jesus Christ. Again, I think it is unmistakable that Hong's delusions got the better of him. Also, Hong only utilized a small portion of Christian texts to comprehend the life of Christ. The failure to utilize all aspects of Christ's life was an omission that Hong was obviously aware of. He only used selections of Christ's life so as to position him in relation to the construction of the Taiping hierarchy and in God's salvation for the Taipings. (39) Moreover, Hong denied Christ's divinity because he assumed Jesus was the heir to his father's inheritance, not his equal. Therefore, the Taipings failed to believe that Christ was God incarnate. Although his Resurrection was regarded as a momentous event in Taiping writings, this did not place Christ on an equal footing with the Heavenly Father. (40)

If Christ's position in Taiping Christianity was rather shaky, one must also look at the position Hong and the Taipings took with regard to the Trinity. Liang's printed text established the notion of a Trinity, but never fully established the basic principles which lied behind it. Hong could not adhere to the idea that there were three Gods in one. This may be due largely to his Confucian educational background. Since Confucian teachings taught the son should be submissive to the father, he never rationalized the notion of father and son being on the same power level. I think it is important to note how literally Taiping officials took this policy to be. For any Taiping religious text, God's name was to be inscribed four spaces above a line and Jesus's name was placed three spaces above. Beneath this, the Heavenly King and his other kings were allotted one space. Likewise, the notion of deference to the Father was taken even further with regard to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was considered unworthy to be inserted within the Trinity. It must be asserted that he thought it impossible to have a relationship between immaterial beings and material beings. In this case, he only viewed the relationship of God and his Holy Son in a bodily sense, not a metaphysical one. This, again, is mostly due to the ancient Chinese Confucian tradition's influence upon Hong. The failure to accept Greek philosophical traditions of the Trinity, I believe, was not so much his fault, as it was the influence his cultural upbringing had upon his interpretation of the Christian Trinity. (41)

If Hong's interpretation of core Protestant Christian principles was questionable, then how did he perceive the Holy Sacraments? The only two known Protestant sacraments and /or observances regularly observed by the Taipings were baptism and the Sabbath. Hong knew of baptism as early as 1843 when he baptized the first followers in his movement. In fact, throughout the 1840s Hong baptized all of his followers. In 1847, when he visited Roberts, Hong attempted to receive formal baptism from Roberts, but was denied it because of Roberts's

belief that Hong was converting for financial gain. After this experience, he taught his followers the practice of self-baptism. By 1852, Hong had made the baptism ceremony into an elaborate ritual that was meant to wash away sin and grant membership into the Taiping fold. The novitiates either bathed themselves or cleansed themselves in a river. While the baptism rite was largely preserved intact, the idea of self-baptism was something that Hong, I perceive, had developed out of his own experiences with Reverend Roberts. (42)

With regard to the Sabbath, Hong made adjustments and kept some things in place as well. From Western Christian thought, he implemented the Sabbath day, yet maintained the Chinese solar term festivals. The Taiping Sabbath took place on a Saturday, but this is where the comparisons end with Western Protestant doctrine. The Taipings, on the day before, placed a large flag in the street that said: "Tomorrow is the Sabbath. Each should be reverent and worship." As the new day began, the followers made baked goods, while singing obnoxious background music out in the open or at local worshipping places. (43) It must be understood that the Sabbath event was not taken lightly. Instead, the Sabbath was a mandatory event that, if not followed, resulted in a severe punishment for those who failed to comply with it. (44) One might make the assumption that this closely resembled Calvin's Geneva or the Puritans in Massachusetts. Unfortunately, this once again reveals Hong's failure to fully appreciate the true meaning of Protestant doctrine.

Finally, how did Hong view hell and the devil? In Taiping scripture, hell was a miserable place. In essence, you were condemned to an eternity of wailing and grinding of teeth. (45) While hell closely resembled the Western conception of hell, there was a significant difference. I believe Hong used the image of hell as a political tool. If one was, in fact, a true Taiping fighter (in other words, a soldier who desired to bring down the Qing), then he would willingly sacrifice himself for the Taiping state. If a Taiping male failed to adhere to this principle, the ultimate result would be eternal damnation. Similarly, if a person failed to follow Taiping doctrine, that person would also face the bonfires of hell. (46) Obviously, those who followed Taiping religious law and fought for the Taiping cause would enter into the blissful state of heaven. (47) With respect to Satan, Hong believed those who worshipped earthly princes or followed earthly matters were under the devil's sway. He even argued that Satan had a group of assistants in his quest for an evil world. He called Satan's assistants' "corrupt devils" and "followers of the fiend." Whatever the case may be, Hong believed that anything not pertaining to the Taiping Christian ideology was doomed to end up in hell. (48)

I think it is important to stress that Taiping Christianity also encountered opposition from the one group it assumed it had the support of: Western missionaries. In 1847, Hong's first meeting with Issachar Roberts was unsuccessful. Roberts must have assumed this young man was not out for the good of Christianity, but for his own personal well being. Yet when Roberts caught word of his one time disciple's revolution in September 1852, he displayed a change of heart. He enthusiastically supported Hong's attempt to evangelize China's interior, something Roberts had never been given the opportunity to do. While Hong waged his war against the Qing Dynasty, Roberts was unable to reach Nanking throughout the 1850s because of personal issues. However, in 1858, Hong sent a communiqué to the British Minister, Lord Elgin, requesting Roberts's presence at court. In September 1860, Roberts arrived, but to a situation he had not expected. When he entered to meet Hong, he was surprised to find the court was not bowing to worship God, but their Heavenly King, Hong Xiuquan. Roberts was taken aback even further when Hong discussed the matter of Taiping evangelization. Roberts could not believe Hong had been so bold as to ask him to spread the

Taiping faith. On issues relating to the Trinity, Jesus's divinity, and the Lord's Supper, Roberts's was surprised to find the Taipings had abandoned or remodeled doctrines to fit their own purposes. (49) When Roberts left in January 1862, he expressed his disappointment about the Taipings. Roberts stated that "Hong was a crazy man, entirely unfit to rule without any organized government; His religious toleration, and multiplicity of chapels, turn out to be a farce, of no avail in the spread of Christianity – worse than useless." (50)

Roberts was not alone in expressing his anger toward Hong. Another prominent missionary, Joseph Edkins, sent him a collection of essays dealing with the issue of God's nature. Edkins's arguments centered largely on the divinity of Jesus and the immateriality of God. He thought Hong should heed the Nicene Creed and declare the teachings of Arius, the infamous Alexandrian priest, heretical. Unsurprisingly, he added his own commentary to Edkins's essays. Hong wrote Edkins to inform him that God had not only one "begotten son," but that "Christ is in God's form." He made certain to include this for fear that his own Sonship would be denied. With reference to Arius, Hong made it blatantly clear that Arius was correct and the Nicene Council was heretical. In his response to Edkins, he wrote, "God is vexed Most by idols and images, so human beings are not allowed to see the Father's likeness. But Christ and myself were begotten by the Father, and because we were in the Father's Bosom, therefore we saw God." (51) It is obvious that Edkins and Roberts both presumed the Taiping Movement, especially their leader, Hong, exerted fanatical control over Taiping religious life. Both men never anticipated the Taiping Movement would turn out to be a tyrant's field day in the sun. (52)

By May 1861, Hong's megalomania had reached epic proportions. One might say that Hong's reclusive state of being contributed to his belief that he should only focus on spiritual matters and abandon all things temporal. Moreover, Hong's display of abnormal behavior lingered over into his obsessive commentaries on the Bible. (53) His continual downfall into the abyss of mental decrepitude was something that he no longer controlled. In my opinion, he was no longer a spiritual man, but a tyrant who sought to achieve his own salvation. His abandonment of everyday affairs revealed that he no longer cared, in my view, about whether his movement succeeded or failed. (54) By 1864, as the Taiping Kingdom was crushed by the Qing dynasty, Hong's futile dream of a Taiping Heavenly Kingdom was destroyed forever. (55)

In conclusion, Hong Xiuquan is one of the most unique characters in all of human history. While great men have led momentous movements, such as Napoleon or Alexander the Great, Hong is quite different in one important aspect. While he desired power, he also exerted control over all matters involving Christian theology. In fact, I believe this may be the worst kind of megalomania. The combination of spiritual and temporal power led Hong to believe that he was unique. In fact, it is quite possible that he assumed he led an apocalyptic movement. Hong convinced himself that the Taiping movement would bring about a new day for China. (56) I believe Hong saw himself as possessing special traits necessary for ridding the world of evil (the Qing Dynasty/Confucian teachings) and making a new world order based on Taiping doctrine.

The purity of Protestant Christianity had been tainted by Hong's personal willingness to reconstruct key doctrines and biblical passages for his own ideological purposes. This argument, I believe, is valid because Hong was never ordained to be a preacher in Protestant doctrine. He was never educated in the Protestant tradition. Therefore, as much as he perceived himself as a religious man, he was, in fact, a secular leader. His government used and abused Protestant Christianity to wage a "holy war" of sorts against the Qing government. Hong had subverted the purity of Protestant Christian doctrine by placing strict moral codes

upon his people. Likewise, his demagogic and authoritarian approach toward religious matters was not "Christian" behavior. In 19th century Europe, most secular leaders had all but abandoned the doctrine of Divine Right. Hong, however, was the embodiment of the Taiping religion and state. Yet Hong was an incapable spiritual and temporal leader. In fact, he was not a leader; he was the antithesis of both the former and latter. Hong was the embodiment of future 20th century dictators who believed their conception of the world was the correct one.

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2. Yu-Wen Jen, *The Taiping Revolutionary Movement* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973), 7.
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4. Johnathan Spence, *God's Chinese Son* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), 17.
5. P.M. Yap, "The Mental Illness of Hung Hsiu-Ch'uan, Leader of the Taiping Rebellion," *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, Volume 13, No. 3, (1954), 292.
6. William James Hail, *Tseng Kuo-Fan and the Taiping Rebellion* (New York: Paragon Book Corporation, 1964.) 34.
7. Yap, 293.
8. Boardman, 13.
9. Spence, 66-68.
10. Yap, 292.
11. Boardman, 14.
12. Yuan Chang Teng, "Reverend Issachar Roberts and the Taiping Rebellion," *Journal of Asian Studies*, Volume 23, No. 1 (Nov. 1963), 56.
13. Boardman, 17.
14. *Ibid*, 20.
15. Spence, 177.
16. Boardman, 43.
17. Spence, 178.
18. *Ibid*, 256.
19. *Ibid*, 259.
20. *Ibid*, 260.
21. *Ibid*, 291.
22. J. C. Cheng, *Chinese Sources for the Taiping Rebellion: 1850-1864* (London and Hong Kong: London and Hong Kong University Press, 1963.), 83.
23. Spence, 261.
24. Hail, 107.
25. *Ibid*, 113.
26. Jen, 162.
27. Yap, 295.
28. *Ibid*, 298. The state of delirium Yap describes involves a twilight-state effect upon Hong. In this case, the patient is typically in a psychotic waking dream. There is normally no fever or other bodily illness which accompanies this condition. This condition is usually brought about by strong emotions in the patient. These emotions usually pertain to an event or events that had recently gone awry for the patient. If this is the case, Hong's delirium was largely related to the circumstances surrounding his failure of his latest Confucian exam. Therefore, it might seem quite reasonable to assume Hong's mental condition was an outpouring of his failure to pass the Confucian examinations.
29. Yap, 300.

30. Jen, 155.
31. Eugene Boardman, "Christian Influence Upon the Ideology of the Taiping Rebellion," *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, Volume 10, No. 2, (Feb., 1951), 115-124.
32. Jen, 157.
33. Boardman, 70.
34. Boardman, 120.
35. Hail, 104.
36. Jen, 158.
37. Boardman, 121.
38. Boardman, 72.
39. Ibid, 75.
40. Ibid, 79.
41. Jen, 161.
42. Boardman, 76.
43. Ibid, 78.
44. Hail, 115.
45. Boardman, 87.
46. Ibid, 84.
47. Ibid, 86.
48. Ibid, 80.
49. Teng, 64.
50. Ibid, 66.
51. Spence, 289.
52. Hail, 116.
53. Spence, 290.
54. Spence, 315.
55. Spence, 326.
56. David Ownby, "Chinese Millenarian Traditions: The Formative Age," *American Historical Review*, Volume 104, No. 5, (Dec. 1999), 1513.